

Intermediate Writing Workshop

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INTERMEDIATE WRITING WORKSHOP

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INTRODUCTION

INTERMEDIATE WRITING WORKSHOP

SCHEDULE

1st Day

8:30	Introduction
9:00	Basic Questions in Writing
10:15	Break
10:30	Thinking and Organizing to Plan the Product
11:30	Lunch
12:30	Drafting Strategies
4:00	Adjourn

2nd Day

8:30	Options in Writing Sentences
10:30	Break
10:45	Structural Unity and Coherence
11:30	Lunch
12:30	Structured Writing
2:00	Workshop
3:30	Evaluation
4:00	Adjourn

INTERMEDIATE WRITING WORKSHOP

PREFACE

This intermediate writing course was designed, tested, and reviewed by COHD's Training Branch and by staff and consultants in OPS's Writing Resources Branch, GS&C. It focuses on the writing process; during the two day course, participants write and review a two or three page product.

INTERMEDIATE WRITING WORKSHOP

OVERVIEW OF THE COURSE

OVERVIEW

Writers must keep in mind a number of complex issues when writing: Who are they writing for? What is the purpose of their product? Have they accounted for changes in subject matter? Are the sentences and paragraphs best structured to carry meaning and clarify logic?

This course addresses some of these complex issues by introducing concepts about the writing process and by asking participants to write a product using these concepts.

PURPOSE AND GOAL

Writers at GAO have special challenges. They must know the writing process and apply it in the GAO environment. The purpose of this course is to explain and discuss the writing process in general and at GAO; the goal is to help GAO writers practice the skills on brainstorming, charting, outlining, drafting, and revising.

OBJECTIVES

- Explain principles of audience and purpose, and use them to develop a strategy for drafting GAO products.
- Use brainstorming, charting, and outlining to organize information for GAO products.
- Use principles of effective sentence structure to discuss and revise sentences.
- Use principles of unity and coherence to construct effective products.
- Use structured reading to evaluate the effectiveness of products for particular audiences and purposes.
- Use principles of sentence and paragraph structure to revise a product

INTERMEDIATE WRITING WORKSHOP

AGENDA

MODULE I: INTRODUCTION AND BASIC QUESTIONS IN WRITING

Since this course focuses on using the writing process effectively, participants will begin with an exercise to help them discover the basic principles from which all writers work. This module will show two things:

1. How the relationship of subject, purpose, reader, and writer affects the writing process, and
2. How the parts of a sentence contribute to meaning.

MODULE II: THINKING AND ORGANIZING TO PLAN THE PRODUCT

In this module, participants will learn to use brainstorming, charting, and outlining as steps in a process of effective planning.

MODULE III: USING DRAFTING STRATEGIES

In this module, participants will analyze audience and purpose to develop a strategy for drafting a particular product. They will draft products using the strategies they have developed.

MODULE IV: OPTIONS IN WRITING SENTENCES

This module will develop principles of sentence structure that contribute to effective GAO writing. Participants will learn how to use structures that promote direct, logical expression of ideas.

MODULE V: STRUCTURAL UNITY AND COHERENCE

This module demonstrates how effective paragraph and section structure depends on conceptual unity and coherence. Participants will analyze and revise texts to improve their structure.

MODULE VI: THE REVISING PROCESS: STRUCTURED READING

Participants will learn to use critical reading strategies to revise written products.

MODULE VII: GROUP WORK

Participants will apply structured reading techniques to the products they prepared in Module III, and will then revise their products.

INTERMEDIATE WRITING WORKSHOP

COURSE SUMMARY

The intermediate writing course focuses on the writing process. It helps evaluators recognize how all writers work out choices about audience, purpose, organization, sentences, and words. Through individual and group exercises, evaluators focus on writing on the job.

MODULE I

INTERMEDIATE WRITING WORKSHOP

MODULE I: INTRODUCTION AND BASIC QUESTIONS IN WRITING

SYNOPSIS

Since this course focuses on using the writing process effectively, participants will begin with an exercise to help them discover the basic principles from which all writers work. This module will show two things:

1. How the relationship of subject, purpose, reader, and writer affects the writing process, and
2. How the parts of a sentence contribute to meaning.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this module, participants will be able to see the relationships within the writing situation and analyze how structure contributes to meaning.

OUTLINE OF PRESENTATION

- I. Orientation, Objectives, Introduction
- II. Buzz-Phrase Projector Exercise
- III. Discussion: Structure as Meaning
- IV: The Writing Situation

Structure as Meaning

Verbal communication is a combination of two factors: the meanings of the words we use and the meanings of the structures in which we use them. To demonstrate that structures convey meaning, look at the Systematic Buzz-Phrase Projector on the following page. Notice how you can make two buzz phrases and join them with a verb in standard subject-verb-object order, for example, "balanced management options (9-0-0) produce total policy mobility (1-9-3)." The result sounds "official." Because we expect the subject-verb-object combination to convey meaning, we are almost willing, at first glance, to accept this nonsense sentence as meaningful. Consider the combination of carefully chosen words and appropriate structures; they are powerful means for conveying meaning. This course has been designed to help you recognize appropriate structures and use the writing process effectively to build them.

SYSTEMATIC BUZZ - PHRASE PROJECTOR

<u>1st Digit</u>	<u>2nd Digit</u>	<u>3rd Digit</u>
0. Integrated	0. Management	0. Options
1. Total	1. Organizational	1. Flexibility
2. Systematized	2. Monitored	2. Capability
3. Parallel	3. Reciprocal	3. Mobility
4. Functional	4. Digital	4. Programming
5. Responsive	5. Logistical	5. Concept
6. Optional	6. Transitional	6. Time-phase
7. Synchronized	7. Incremental	7. Projection
8. Compatible	8. Third-generation	8. Hardware
9. Balanced	9. Policy	9. Contingency

PROCEDURE: Select any three-digit number at random and make the appropriate substitutions from the column above for a phrase that may be dropped into virtually any report for that ring of authority. No one will have the remotest idea of what you have said, but no one is going to admit it.

The Writing Situation

Every writing project begins with a mission: you communicate something to someone for a reason. Before you write, you need to understand the elements that define your writing situation. What is the subject? What is your purpose in writing? Who is the reader you are addressing? What role do you as writer play in regard to your reader?

subject area	purpose
writer	audience

Unless you understand the writing situation, you will not be able to produce a satisfactory product. In addition, lack of clarity about the writing situation can slow down the writing process, as you grope for a basis on which to make writing decisions.

Memorandum

GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

March 19, 1984

TO : ARS Staff

FROM : Office of Systems and Procedures Formulation and Implementation

SUBJECT: FUSS II

Attached is a second generation Fan Utilization Sharing Schedule (FUSS II) for application to the one functional air circulation device currently assigned to Audit Reference Services (ARS).

The malfunctioning of one of the air circulation devices previously utilized in ARS, and the unavailability of a replacement, has effected a net loss of one apparatus and resulted in an increased need for cooperation and coordination.

It is essential that the remaining piece of air circulating equipment be maintained in an operational status and secured at all times.

To effect that situation the following procedures have been formulated:

1. Each ARS section shall prepare, according to Order 1001.992, a Monthly Report on Air Circulation Apparatus Utilization and Maintenance using Form 333 (7-80); to be submitted in triplicate to the Coordinator, Office of Systems and Procedures Monitoring.

2. With the adjournment of the work commitment each day the ARS section which has utilized the air condition device shall locate the apparatus in the Acquisitions area, for security reasons.

The diminished number of available devices and the continuing inadequate ventilation among the work stations of ARS personnel dictate the seriousness and necessity of the implementation of FUSS II beginning on July 14. Substitutable procedures continue to be unavailable.

MODULE II

INTERMEDIATE WRITING WORKSHOP

MODULE II: THINKING AND ORGANIZING TO PLAN THE PRODUCT

SYNOPSIS

In this module, participants will learn to use brainstorming, charting, and outlining as steps in a process of effective planning.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this module, participants will be able to list the elements of the planning phase of the writing process and explain how to use strategies such as charting and outlining for supporting the writing process.

OUTLINE OF PRESENTATION

- I. Introduction to Thinking and Organizing
- II. Review of Chart

Introduction to Thinking and Organizing

Once you have established the writing situation for a product, you are ready to develop and organize your message. You will need to work with facts, concepts, and arrangement. Although some writers try to work with these elements in their heads, efficient writers use thinking and organizing strategies to help them isolate and develop each element on paper. The following principles of thinking and organizing can help you control your writing projects:

- Brainstorming is a way of seeing what data, facts, details, or even ideas the writer has available. When brainstorming, the writer makes no effort to order the material; he or she merely generates it.
- Charting is a way of discovering the basic concepts involved in a message by a process of sorting out the material that brainstorming has collected. The writer "charts" the associations among the collected materials, finding categories and generalizations.
- Outlining is a way of systematically ordering the concepts derived by charting. Although many writers have been trained to think of this as a first step, it is really the final step of planning. An outline that uses sentences to designate key points is the most useful preparation for drafting.

WRITING AND THINKING

WRITING ACTIVITY	THINKING ACTIVITY
ANALYZING AUDIENCE AND PURPOSE	tone approach emphasis
BRAINSTORMING	ideas facts critical data
CHARTING	connections relative importance categories
OUTLINING	main points support sequence priorities

MODULE III

INTERMEDIATE WRITING WORKSHOP

MODULE III: USING DRAFTING STRATEGIES

SYNOPSIS

In this module, participants will analyze audience and purpose to develop a strategy for drafting. They will draft products in groups so that the product may later be reviewed.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this module, participants will be able to draft a product using the steps involved in the previous module: brainstorming, charting, and outlining.

OUTLINE OF PRESENTATION

- I. Summary and Review of Drafting Strategies
- II. Exercise: Drafting a Product

Exercise: Drafting a Product

Many writers use the drafting process inefficiently. Instead of planning systematically, they think they will save time by doing their planning in their heads as they write. As a result writing becomes a chore, something that seems to require more energy than it is worth.

Efficient writers know how to break the writing process into manageable pieces, building a document from a given subject. You will be assigned techniques to use for brainstorming, charting, and outlining in groups.

Assignment

1. Working in groups assigned by your instructor, decide what kind of document you will produce on the subject of "performance appraisals." Discuss your intended reader, your purpose, and the role you will perform as writers. (You will have the rest of the day to plan and produce a rough first draft.)
2. After you have established the writing situation (step 1), work individually for ten minutes to brainstorm on the subject. Write down phrases that occur to you in connection with the mission you have established. Then, working in groups, pool and expand this material by writing down the phrases on "Post-it" pads. Your goal in this part of the exercise is simply to accumulate information; however, you may refer to step 3 to help you expand the available information. (These steps may be performed simultaneously.)
3. Once your group has accumulated a body of information, chart the information by sorting it into conceptual categories. (You may wish to establish your categories to help with the brainstorming

process in step 2.) Your goal at this stage is to develop a logic tree, using the "Post-its," that will help you define the logic of your message. Your instructor will assist you in the charting process.

4. When your group has developed a logic tree and discussed it with the instructor, you are ready to consider how you will present the logic of your message to a reader. Rearrange the "Post-its" in groups that will serve the reader's needs; this new arrangement might or might not be different from the logic tree. Transfer the arrangement of "Post-its" to a large sheet of paper and develop an outline around them. Your outline should include statements in full sentences of each major point with "Post-its" arranged under each point to remind you of what specific information you will use to develop each point. When you are finished, you will have a planning document that records the groups consensus as to 1) the principal points of the message, 2) the order of presentations, and 3) specific information to substantiate the points.
5. When your instructor has approved your planning document, assign a section to each member of the group and draft the document. Make sure you finish by the end of the day, so that your document can be typed the following morning. You will revise the document the following afternoon.

MODULE IV

INTERMEDIATE WRITING WORKSHOP

MODULE IV: OPTIONS IN WRITING SENTENCES

SYNOPSIS

Certain kinds of sentence structure contribute to effective GAO writing, others do not. Prepositional overuse, noun-strings, hidden verbs, etc., all make reading difficult for the reader. In this module, participants will learn to identify problems and to use structures that promote direct, logical expression of ideas.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this module, participants will be able to use guidelines for writing effective sentences.

OUTLINE OF PRESENTATION

- I. Introduction
- II. Grammatical Subject
- III. Verb and Controlling Idea
- IV. Structure and Logic

Introduction

Sentence structure gives the reader subliminal signals that channel the reader's attention. Good sentence structure helps the reader to know:

- 1) what the writer's central point is,
- 2) what information supports the central point, and
- 3) what relationship exists between the central point and supporting information.

The central point in a sentence should be carried in the center of the structure, the predication:

Predication = subject + verb + complement

Example: Congress passed a law.

The central point can be expanded or clarified by modification. Modifiers can be single words (adverbs or adjectives), phrases (adverbial or adjectival), or clauses (adverbial or adjectival). (A phrase is a group of words that acts as a unit and does not include a subject and verb. A clause is a group of words that acts as a unit and does include subject and verb.)

Modification = words, phrases, and clauses

Words:

- necessary (adjective)
- immediately (adverb)

Example: Congress immediately passed a necessary law.

Phrases:

- in an emergency session
- regulating the sale of the new chemical
- to prevent loss of lives

Example: In an emergency session, Congress passed a law regulating the sale of the new chemical to prevent loss of lives.

Clauses:

--because accidents have caused public outrage

--which increased daily

Example: Because accidents have caused public outrage which increased daily, Congress passed a law.

Conjunctions are used to introduce clauses and assign them status. A clause can be coordinated with another having equal weight and emphasis, or it can be subordinated to another acting as a modifier to it.

Coordinating Conjunctions (and Conjunctive Adverbs)

and	furthermore
but	however
or/nor	moreover
yet	nevertheless
so	therefore
for	thus

Subordinating Conjunctions (and Relative Pronouns)

although	after	who
because	before	which
unless	until	what
if	since	that
as	while	
as if		

Guidelines for Effective Sentence Structure

- I. The grammatical subject should be what the sentence is about.
 - 1) Subordinate citation.
 - 2) Avoid empty constructions: "it is," "there is," etc.
- II. The verb should express the controlling idea.
 - 1) Use action verbs instead of linking verbs.
 - 2) Avoid hidden verbs.
 - 3) Express doer and action in subject/verb relationships:
avoid passive voice.
- III. Sentence structure should express the logical relationship of ideas.
 - 1) Use main clause for main idea and dependent clauses for related ideas.
 - 2) Use parallel structure for equivalent items in a list.
 - 3) Avoid loading too much information in a single clause.

Grammatical Subject

I. Grammatical subject should be what the sentence is about.

- 1) Subordinate citation.
- 2) Avoid empty constructions: "it is," "there is," etc.

Exercises

Revise the following examples using the guidelines cited above.

- I.1 Example: The Soo Area Engineer said that the Corps should replace 10% of the costs each year.

Revision:

- I.2 Example: By the late 1950's there were at least 25 different federal organizations that had a water research project of some sort.

Revisions:

Verb and Controlling Idea

II. The verb should express the controlling idea.

- 1) Use action verbs instead of linking verbs.

The linking verbs are: am, is, are, was, were, been (plus auxiliary), appears, and seems.

- 2) Avoid hidden verbs.
- 3) Express doer and action in subject/verb relationships: avoid passive voice.

Note that passive voice is desirable when:

- doer is unknown,
- doer is unimportant,
- doer is deliberately deemphasized, or
- doer is obvious.

Exercises

Revise the following examples using the guidelines cited above.

- II.1 Example: These projects are in compliance with government regulations.

Revision:

- II.2 Example: The Railroad Retirement Board made the determination for benefit entitlements.

Revision:

- II.3 Example: The following problems were cited by Navy, NASA, and FAA officials.

Revision:

Structure and Logic

III. Sentence structure should express the logical relationship of ideas.

- 1) Use main clause for main idea and dependent clauses for related ideas.
- 2) Use parallel structure for equivalent items in a list.
- 3) Avoid loading too much information in a single clause.

Exercises

III.1 Example: Bureau projects may require years to complete and, thus, the increase may be considerable in congressional authorization resulting from inflationary price increases.

Revision:

III.2 Example: The funds will pay for consultants, sending selected Korean technicians abroad for training and purchase of sterilization commodities.

Revision:

III.3 Example: The HUD prototype cost areas used by the Commission to determine the housing inflation factor for the reservation area have been changed by HUD four times in the five annual adjustments.

Revision:

More Structure as Meaning

The examples on the following page provide further indication of the power of structure to convey meaning. Even words with no meaningful relationship appear to say a great deal when they are combined in related structures. Structure is an important factor in conveying meaning.

Table A

1. In particular,
2. On the other hand,
3. However,
4. Similarly,
5. As a resultant implication,
6. In this regard,
7. Based on integral subsystem considerations,
8. For example,
9. Thus,
10. In respect to specific goals,

Table B

1. a large portion of the interface coordination communication
2. a constant flow of effective, communication information
3. the characterization of specific criteria
4. initiation of critical subsystem development
5. the fully integrated test program
6. the product configuration baseline
7. any associated supporting element
8. the incorporation of additional mission constraints
9. the independent functional principle
10. a primary interrelationship between system and/or subsystem technologies

Table C

1. must utilize and be functionally interwoven with
2. maximizes the probability of project success and minimizes the cost and time required for
3. adds explicit performance limits to
4. necessitates that urgent consideration be applied to
5. require considerable systems analysis and trade off studies to arrive at
6. is further compounded, when taking into account
7. presents extremely interesting challenges to
8. recognizing the importance of other systems and the necessity for
9. affects a significant implementation of
10. adds overriding performance constraints

Table D

1. the sophisticated hardware
2. the anticipated fourth generation equipment
3. the subsystem compatibility testing
4. the structural design, based on system engineering concepts
5. the preliminary qualification limit
6. the evolution of specifications over a given period of time
7. the philosophy of commonality and standardization
8. the greater flight worthiness concept
9. any discrete configuration mode
10. the total system rationale

MODULE V

INTERMEDIATE WRITING WORKSHOP

MODULE V: STRUCTURAL UNITY AND COHERENCE

SYNOPSIS

This module emphasizes the importance of unity and coherence in effective writing. It provides an opportunity for participants to practice developing topic sentences and analyzing writing samples for unity and coherence.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this module, participants will be able to recognize principles of unity in model paragraphs and develop topic sentences for them, and recognize principles of coherence.

OUTLINE OF PRESENTATION

- I. Structural Unity
- II. Topic Sentence Exercise
- III. Coherence
- IV. Coherence Exercise

Structural Unity

Readers are confused by strings of information without a context. To communicate effectively with readers, we must present information in such a way that they perceive groupings of facts and ideas. We provide this conceptual framework through the structure of paragraphs and clusters of paragraphs. When these paragraph structures are effective, that is, when information is presented with unity and coherence, readers can correctly perceive the relationship of all the information.

Unity

Paragraphs should be unified around a central concept. When we are simply packaging information for easy access as in workpapers, this central concept may simply consist of a subject category. When we are presenting a message as in analytic or persuasive documents, the unifying central concept should consist of a controlling idea applied to the subject category. That is, we will be concerned not just with a "what," but with a "what about it." We call the sentence that introduces the subject and controlling idea of a paragraph the topic sentence.

Topic Sentence

Subject	+	Controlling Idea
(What?)		(What about it?)

For example, the following sentence lets us know "what?" and "what about it?":

Alcohol abuse is more prevalent in the military than drug abuse.

The following paragraph samples treat the same subject according to different purposes. The first might be appropriate for workpapers, the second, for a report. Compare the first sentence of each to see what each promises the reader.

Subject category

According to AID officials, smallpox eradication efforts in Ghana consisted of using correct medical technology, identifying and treating the ill, and educating people. One official explained that smallpox was difficult to eradicate because, for one large tribe, the disease was considered holy. He explained that anyone who had survived the disease, an unlikely event, was considered to be holy and to have special powers. Therefore, during an epidemic, people who had contracted the disease were often hidden from the doctors. Smallpox was almost gone in Ghana by 1930 because of government education by the British, but isolated cases appeared until 1960. Finally, AID officials were able to identify the last remnants of the disease, and to isolate those who had it, by the mid-60's.

Subject category + controlling idea

AID's smallpox eradication program in Ghana has been successful for three reasons. First, the medical technology was advanced enough to eradicate smallpox under controlled conditions. Second, AID workers were able to identify the problem of the religious significance of smallpox for some of Ghana's people. In one tribe, the Ghanaians who had survived smallpox were considered holy, so that smallpox carried both threat and privilege. Third, AID workers were able to isolate infected individuals who refused treatment so that the disease could not spread.

Topic Sentence Exercise

Provide a topic sentence for the following:

1. _____

Routes were blocked from Guatemala City through the surrounding mountain terrain to the most damaged areas. Roads were covered by landslides, bridges were out, and the railroad was disrupted. Thus, officials could not immediately assess the scope of damage and assistance needed following the earthquake.

2. _____

For the immediate future, a very clear and broad market exists outside the Rocky Mountain area for coal, particularly for Northern Great Plains coal. Much of the market for Northern Great Plains coal, which is low in sulfur, is with utilities in the Midwest. However, because of shipping costs, Northern Great Plains coal costs more than high-sulfur coal. Therefore, the long-term market for Northern Great Plains coal is less certain.

3. _____

Over 2 years of that delay was caused by reductions of \$2.7 million, \$1.2 million, and \$5.7 million from amounts recommended by the Corps division and district offices in fiscal years 1969, 1970, and 1972. The additional 1-year delay resulted from Office of Management and Budget requirements that project funding for the projects for fiscal years 1978-81 be limited to prescribed amounts.

4. _____

The Congress can change the tax laws, vote to spend public funds, pass laws to encourage specific behavior, or decide to regulate a particular activity or industry. Each program alternative may successfully achieve the desired policy objective; but the programs themselves might differ in administrative ease, popularity, cost to the government and public, and the extent of unintended consequences.

Coherence

A paragraph should not only be unified, it should help the reader perceive the unity through a coherent presentation of information. Every piece of information should be seen as 1) related to the controlling idea and 2) related to the information before it and after it in the paragraph. To achieve paragraph coherence, we rely on the following principles:

1. Logical order.
2. Transitional devices.
3. Parallel structure.
4. Effective repetition.

Coherence Exercise

Discuss the flow and presentation of information. Decide what techniques, if any, link the sentences together.

1. A model is a representation of a system. It is constructed to show how a system can be expected to react under different conditions during a given period of time. Constructed properly, it illuminates and clarifies the interrelationships of component parts and of cause and effect, action and reaction. It allows people to assimilate and systematically analyze large numbers of variables which they otherwise could not do.
2. No consistent relationship exists between unemployment rates and the fiscal well-being of governments. Some governments in areas with high unemployment were in good financial condition and received large antirecession payments. Conversely, governments with low unemployment took actions to counter federal stimulative efforts and received less assistance per capita.
3. Better evaluations of architect/engineer (A/E) performance are needed. We believe evaluations based on factors such as the A/E's success in meeting time constraints, significance of construction changes due to design deficiencies, and any resulting A/E liability would provide additional means for assessing A/E performance. Uniform government-wide criteria are needed for evaluating A/E performance. All agencies could exchange their evaluations, with meaningful results, if such criteria were used.

4. The program still has not overcome its earlier problems. Of the children eligible under this lunch program, 43 percent had not applied for the reduced rate. Many families had never heard of the program. The program was not popular with many school administrators. Administrators felt that the program required them to pry too deeply into the personal lives of their students.

The following sentences have been taken from a paragraph and scrambled. To illustrate the principles of coherence, put them in the order in which you believe they were originally written. Look for transitional devices, logical relationships, parallel structure, and repetitions.

Admissions to the program declined, however, to the point that the staff had extraordinarily light work loads.

Rehabilitation officials attributed the decline to counseling that commanders gave service personnel with minor drug problems at the unit level without sending them to the base program.

The program's director said the counselors were not being efficiently used.

At some military bases, the programs had not yet been reduced.

At Fort Bliss, Texas, for example, the combined drug and alcohol resident rehabilitation facility had a capacity of 20.

When we visited in June 1974, the program consisted of six full-time counselors and three drug and five alcohol patients.

In addition, at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, the number of program participants declined approximately 65 percent from 173 in January to 60 in March 1984.

MODULE VI

INTERMEDIATE WRITING WORKSHOP

MODULE VI: THE REVISING PROCESS: STRUCTURED READING

SYNOPSIS

In the module, participants will learn to use critical reading strategies to revise written products. They will learn to read for both structure and sentence level problems.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this module, participants will be able to follow the steps for structured reading and apply those steps to a written product.

OUTLINE OF PRESENTATION

- I. Structured Reading: 6 Steps
- II. Exercise in Structured Reading

Structured Reading: 6 Steps

Effective revision, the final phase of the writing process, requires that we make decisions about our own rough cuts that will help us present our message better. Many writers read their work inefficiently, correcting grammar and spelling without considering the larger issue of structure. In fact, if the structure is ineffective, the writer gains little by working on sentence style first: the sentences will very likely change when the order in which they occur changes.

To read effectively for revising, follow these steps:

1. Decide on your objective. If you are dealing with a rough cut, you will need to concentrate first on paragraphs and clusters of paragraphs. (Only when you are satisfied with the structure should you read for sentence style and for correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.)
 2. Examine the advance organizers: title, captions, topic sentences. Reading only the advance organizers, can you follow the message?
 3. If the advance organizers do not successfully convey the message, look at your outline. Have you followed it? Or is the outline faulty? Try reordering points, or, if necessary, look in your draft for more appropriate statements to use as advance organizers.
 4. Examine clusters of paragraphs or sections to see whether they provide a unified context. Does each paragraph in the cluster continue the development of the main idea?
 5. Examine paragraphs for unity and coherence. Make sure sentence structures contribute to unity and coherence.
- Correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

Exercise in Structured Reading

Use structured reading to review the following sample. What changes do the writers need to make? Can you say what they did right and what they did wrong?

AN EVALUATION OF GAO'S PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL SYSTEM

This chapter analyzes the performance appraisal system in the context of the larger GAO review of its personnel system. Among complaints received, those dealing with the performance appraisal system were especially widespread. Appendix A contains an account of the development of this performance appraisal system.

Inconsistent Application and Low Employee Morale

After assessing the operation of the performance appraisal system, we found many problems with the system. Instructions in the performance appraisal manual are confusing and inconsistent. Interviews with supervisors and EIC's in GAO's divisions revealed that many supervisors gave ratings with no written justifications for the ratings. Also, interviews with the employees at the GS-13 level and below reveal low employee morale and dissatisfaction with the performance appraisal system.

Instructions in the performance appraisal manual were found to be complicated and there was little consistency throughout GAO. No illustrations (in instructions) or examples were given in the instructions. Instructions are very long and complicated. There were also differences in the instructions for the operating divisions, the supporting divisions, and the regions.

Many supervisors in GAO's divisions gave ratings with no written justifications for the ratings. Supervisors in operating divisions gave no written justifications for their ratings, and ratings were higher in those divisions. Supervisors in supporting divisions gave written justification for this rating, and had lower ratings than in the operating divisions. Supervisors in the regions gave justifications for ratings on GS-13 and above only, and had lower ratings than in any of the operating divisions.

Employees at the GS-13 level and below revealed dissatisfaction with the performance appraisal system and a general low employee morale. Employees' morale in the region and the supporting divisions were low. Employees did not want to attend training courses or have career counseling to improve themselves.

Employees in the operating divisions had a somewhat higher morale. All employees interviewed stated a dissatisfaction with the performance appraisal system.

Criteria

Criteria for the GAO performance appraisal system are set forth in GAO Order 923.5, Federal Regulation Number 717778.3, adopted October 1, 1983 (see appendix B). The regulation requires that the appraisal system have the following characteristics:

- comprehensive: inclusion of all position classifications
- detailed standards specifically relevant to each position classification
- consistent application
- procedures to establish good communications between supervisor and employee regarding expectations and fulfillment of those expectations.

The Human Resource Division is required to develop a set of performance measures specific to each position. Each appraiser is to receive thorough training, not only in the methodology of using these measures but also in the intent behind them. The training process is to be tested by an assessment of uniformity among different divisions and among the supervisors within a given region, as well as among appraisal boards and other reviewers. The object is to achieve a uniform meaning for each rating throughout the organization.

Development and communication of the appraisal is to use a process and tone that enhance communication from supervisor to employee and employee to supervisor. Toward this end, the regulation calls for an established procedures for questioning and rebuttal as well as periodic feedback between ratings. Regular appraisals are to occur often enough to given each employee the benefit of several appraisals as the basis for promotion and/or rewards decisions.

Cause and Effect

Performance appraisal problems seem to lie in

- the way the instructions are written resulting in too many reviewers of each rating before the employee is rated;
- a fundamental lack of understanding of the concepts behind the performance appraisal system;
- a lack of training rather than the basic system itself;
- and a frequent revision of the system rather than at predetermined intervals.

The above listed causes result in an uneven application of the standards among the divisions and among supervisors. This, in turn, results in an uneven application of the various levels of coordination between supervisors within divisions. As a result, the performance appraisal is not being used as a tool for improving communication between management and employees. Quite often, it is viewed as another task to be completed and forgotten as soon as possible. Therefore, employees do not have the opportunity for rebuttal or questioning his/her rating and there is also a lack of interim ratings.

The Need for Proper Performance Appraisal Training and Instructions

During an analysis of GAO's performance appraisal system the following items were included:

1. The currently established performance appraisal system has not been effective because its recipients have not received proper training in preparing adequate and detailed evaluations, and
2. The performance appraisal instruction manual has not accomplished its purpose of being a good and stable foundation for personnel actions because of its inconsistent application.

Recommendations

We recommend the performance appraisal training be improved by establishing GAO internal training seminars which outline the basic format, purpose and function of evaluating staff members regularly. We also recommend performance appraisal instructions have a one-time comprehensive set of standards rather than frequent revisions throughout the year.

MODULE VII

INTERMEDIATE WRITING WORKSHOP

MODULE VII: GROUP WORK

SYNOPSIS

During this final segment of the course, participants will use structured reading to evaluate their written products. They will discuss overall structure, paragraph structure, and will consider how their drafting strategies affected these elements. Participants will then revise their products.

OBJECTIVES

Participants will review the principles and skills of the course.

OUTLINE OF PRESENTATION

- I. Discussion of Writing problems
- II. Group writing
- III. Process: thinking and organizing
- IV. Paragraphs and sentences

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